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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: AIRPORT POLICE CHIEF DISCUSSES
COUNTER-TERRORISM, U.S. TRAINING, AIRPORT THEFTS

Ref: (A) Buenos Aires 2032

11. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador's October 22 meeting with GOA Airport Police chief Marcelo Sain (protect throughout) focused on common counter-terrorism goals and the need to continue working together on airport security issues. Sain thanked the Ambassador for recent FBI- and DHS-provided training in the United States and sought more as available. Sain outlined his budget priorities that emphasize infrastructure and training. The Ambassador expressed concern about recent thefts of high-value items in airport passenger baggage and its potential impact on visiting American citizens. END SUMMARY.

Thanks for U.S.-provided Training; Offer for More

12. (SBU) In a cordial meeting between the Ambassador and Marcelo Sain, the two sides reviewed recent FBI-sponsored briefings in the United States for senior PSA officials. Sain thanked the Ambassador for the May 2007 training at FBI headquarters, the National Joint Terrorism Task Force, the Terrorist Screening Center, FBI Academy, and Miami International Airport's law enforcement interagency working group. Sain and his deputy, Nicolas Rodriguez Games, attended these briefings with the FBI's Assistant Legal Attache (also present at the meeting). Sain expressed interest in working with the United States in the future. The Ambassador indicated that there would likely be future opportunities. Legatt cited a four-week training course at FBI Headquarters in March/April 2008 as a possibility.

PSA Budgets and Accountability

13. (SBU) Sain explained that a large majority of his resources were being funneled towards airport infrastructure and airport police training. More specifically, money was being spent to improve noted vulnerabilities to terrorists such as unguarded tunnels underneath the runways and the organized theft rings. Sain said that the GOA's focus on the October 2007 national elections have impeded his agency's effort so far to make large-scale and needed changes. According to Sain, a key problem PSA faces is the lack of adequate funding to fully establish a police agency with aviation security responsibilities. He confided that he felt PSA is not viewed as an important security agency within the government as are the federal police. Sain noted the difficulties in providing police and aviation security services at the major airports is compounded by the many different entities (Customs, state-owned ground handling company Intercargo, and Immigration, among others) that have responsibilities at the airport, and partly as a result, relations have been strained (ref A). Note: Sain himself has come under some public criticism for his sometimes tense relations with these and other airport entities, as well as for his outspoken and confrontational response to criticism.

Thefts at Airports Could Impact American Citizens

14. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the issue of recent reports of several high-profile thefts at the two major Buenos Aires airports, including Ezeiza International Airport. The Ambassador said that this was a source of concern for American tourists. The Ambassador noted his responsibility to protect American citizens and said that given the reportedly increasing incidents of thefts of passenger baggage, he had to consider the possibility of a formal notification to American citizens on this matter. (This would be noted in the Consular Information Sheet. The Ambassador has recently discussed this same issue with the Secretary of Tourism, the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, all to be reported septel.) Sain said that baggage handling was primarily the responsibility of Customs. During a discussion with the TSA representative, Victor Guardia, Sain explained that the certification of the baggage screeners was handled by customs and not by his organization. He also expressed a desire to meet at a later time with TSA to discuss the process in more detail. Sain believed there were organized theft rings in the baggage handling company, "Intercargo" and also theft involving other airport employees. Sain said that they all needed to be cleaned up and that he fully understood the need of the USG to warn its tourists. Sain himself had given interviews to the local media detailing his views of thefts by airport employees. The Ambassador emphasized that the United States was willing to assist in any way possible. Sain said he looked forward to further cooperation with TSA and other USG entities.

Aid for Diplomatic Flights

15. (SBU) The Ambassador expressed his gratitude for Sain's assistance in resolving recent problems encountered by U.S. diplomats with PSA officers attempting to inspect and search the C-12 support aircraft and its crew. Sain was quick to apologize and assured the Ambassador that proper education and instructions were transmitted to PSA personnel at all airports. The Ambassador also noted that a note from Sain could prove to be very useful in future problems of this nature. The Ambassador also expressed his gratitude for the aid of Sain's deputy, Nicolas Rodriguez Games, who has been a reliable Embassy contact on a wide range for issues.

Comment

16. (SBU) Sain expressed a willingness to work more closely with the United States on these important issues. The Ambassador will continue to press Sain and other senior GOA officials regarding the reported thefts of items from passengers' luggage. In the past week, the press reported that several airport employees were arrested for tampering with luggage. Post will also work with FBI,

ICE, TSA and other sections on possible further training for PSA officials.

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